



Here in the Multigraph Letter we look askance at a lot of things that the modern world seems to regard as automatically true. Particularly where it comes to the current deification of the Computer and the society-wide dismissive attitude toward all other prior machines that the human race has ever used, Your Editor finds he is far indeed from concurring. Therefore this publication's ultimate theme is obsolescence—the sad fact of perfectly good people, tools, and ways of working being cast aside in favor of ones that all too frequently seem far worse. The sailing ship, for instance: a laughable relic, or a means of transportation that took nothing irreplaceable from the land, and neither poisoned nor damaged the sea or the air?

The linoleum cut above was hand-engraved and printed by Fred Woodworth on a Multigraph model 230. Text printed by Multilith from electrostatic plates.

FRED'S

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MY FRIEND Kent Winslow wrote the following story after we'd been considering some of the directions in which civilization seemed to be headed. Jargon, for one thing, had almost mechanized official language, and we wondered how far it would go. Television was taken almost as seriously as reality, and even as far back as 1963 my Government teacher in high school had stated that there'd be no good reason to hold a criminal trial of Jack Ruby for murdering Lee Harvey Oswald, since millions of viewers had seen the act on TV. I responded: "Millions have seen Marshall Dillon shoot people, too. But do we even believe there IS a Marshall Dillon?" My objection was brushed aside as frivolous. Later, in the 1970's, I'd had a contract with Xerox University Microfilms which was supposed to involve the photographing of all the back-issues of my monthly commentary journal. Sometime after ward, when I got hold of one of the reels of film and ran it through a projector, I discovered that many issues and many pages in other issues, were missing. How much trust should we put in such a confident and polysyllabic Brave New Reality? When I showed Kent a letter I'd gotten from one of these exponents of Tomorrow who actually used the word "communication-izing", that was enough; a not so unrealistic story was

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born. The last sentence, though spoken by a kind of bureaucrat, could be a good and true epitaph for one of the few real rebels left.

ended up having to go over to his house where the new system was set up.

"Give me a name to look up," he commanded. I thought for a moment, then said, unenthusiastically, "Okay, look up my old friend Gary Timmon."

He typed in the command, "Find Gary Timmon". Nothing happened. He looked puzzled for a second, changed it to "Find Timmon, Gary". Still nothing. He tried adding a colon after "Find", without success.

Over the next half-hour he tried quotation marks around the name, both single and double quotes; upper and lower-case variations; "find" in all lower-case; and every other variation you can think of. He never did find Gary Timmon that night, though I finally did. He was in the telephone book—on paper—and I located his address in about 20 seconds. Days later my computer friend called me up and crowed that he'd finally managed to solve the problem, and now, of course, all we hear about is the ease and convenience, no recognition of the hours and hours of trying to install the software, figure out how to use it, etc....not to mention the amount of time worked to earn the money to buy the system at all, and with no recognition, EVER, of how fragile and jittery things stored therein really are.

Nobody can fight it, or resist it much except on a personal level. But we can certainly be alert to its failings, and maintain, as with everything else in life, a critical and informed attitude.



tometer, would have to dally with for even a single moment—is turned by the computer into a “crisis” that promises to cost untold billions of dollars.

Do I exaggerate? Not if we believe the AP article. It says: “The Gartner Group, an influential technology research firm in Stamford, Connecticut, estimates that large businesses will spend \$100 billion trying to correct their programs. Government agencies may need to spend a similar amount.” One unnamed financial company estimated it would have to spend \$250 million on the “problem”. And if they don’t correct it, everything from paychecks to rent payments—all of which now flow through computers—will leak away into hopeless confusion.

Interesting, isn’t it, how computer “convenience” reveals itself as anything BUT convenience in a lot of places where it counts. Even though the experts still have several more years to work on this problem, and some have been struggling with it for years already, a very real worry is that it can’t be solved completely. And as anyone knows who has ever attempted to get a computerized billing system to recognize an error, in real-life situations it’s a lot harder to “make corrections” than it is to add some meaningless extra word to your PC-stored poetry manuscript. Convenience, where are you now?

A fellow I know who is absolutely infatuated with computers, and perpetually trying to convert me over to their usage (yes, convert is the word; it’s almost like a religion for some of these people), excitedly pleaded over the phone that I simply MUST come over immediately and look at his new system. For one thing, he had all of the voter-registration records for the entire state on one small disk. Tiredly I tried to beg off, but

Vision of the Future

By Kent Winslow



ROCK looked around the tiny room as the lifeless voice chanted on with the usual daily “scheduling.” Only today there was a difference, apparently. Today would be his last. Brock’s wrinkled old face worked with dull emotion as he heard and accepted the Nurs-a-Matic’s electronic pronouncement.

“Additionally,” the apparatus went on, “prior to ultimate finalization, a 3.72-unit pre-terminal period resulticates...” Brock rolled his eyes and almost managed a feeble laugh at the hideous mangling of his native language. “—And this conveniencizing factor is provided to patient usage in *medatation*, pursuant to subsection—”

Medatation—the old man could hear the mistake plainly: an “a” where there ought to be an “i”. God-damn machine; can’t even spell. Brock wondered why it didn’t say “medatationalize” while it was at it. The fucking things aren’t even consistent, he groused silently.

“—And subsection 41.09, paragraph B. Application portions are recitalizable at this time if you desire.” The contrivance paused, as if expecting a res-

ponse. The old man in the hospital bed wasn't even listening.

"Can't spell, can't talk," Brock mumbled. "Can't think; that's for sure. Everybody says they can, but I know they can't. How could anything think a bunch of crap like that?"

An almost overwhelming desire arose in the aged patient, to see another human being. "Nurse!" His shout came out as a dry whisper. The Nurs-a-Matic alertly responded.

"Yes sir!"

"No, not you, you bastard. Real nurse. Gimme a human."

Submicroscopic gates opened in several tiny circuit chips, and a light began to burn at the Personalized Station, deep in the hospital, many floors away.

After a long delay the screen lit up on a unit that lowered from the ceiling until it was directly in front of Brock's face. A woman—a very young woman, no more than about 22, Brock thought—appeared. "Personalized Station speaking."

"Nurse!"

"I am not a nurse, sir. If you wish nurse service, address Nurs-a-Matic."

"Wait!" Brock panted frantically as he saw the operator's hand reach to shut off his screen. "You! I want to talk with you. I need a human being, not a machine."

"Yes sir. Please state what you wish."

From the Editor

THE newspaper for today carries an item about computerized record-keeping that I found significant. Computer engineers, it said, are struggling to fix a problem that may turn a simple aspect of the year 2000 into a (and I quote the Associated Press' word here) "nightmare". Thousands of computer programs, it seems, calculate the year solely on the basis of the last two digits: '70, '80, '95, etc. Therefore, when the year comes up that will end in two zeroes, later to be followed by '01, '02 and so on, whatever computer apparatus there may be that is paying attention, will want to subtract the seemingly smaller number from the larger one.

Seems like a simple problem, doesn't it? Especially when we're subjected to endless propaganda about how childishly simple and easy it is to change things around once you've entered 'em in a computer. People like me, who still use manual typewriters, are subjected to a literal barrage of urging, importuning, and wheedling from television, movies, newspapers, and individual computer enthusiasts, with the object of making us give up our "clumsy" way of doing things. We'll never have to re-type anything ever again! The computer will print it out for us. Add things at will! I have heard every variation of this impassioned plea a hundred times or more.

But when you get right down to cases, where it's important and it counts, the computer's vast flexibility mysteriously evaporates. The trivial problem of what number comes after 1999—something that no old Burroughs or Monroe adding machine, or Comp-

Two days after I set the type for the preceding story, by a coincidence I found the following interesting item in "Profiles— The Magazine of Continental Airlines", (May, 1995, page 12):

"VIEWS FOR THE WINDOWLESS: Believing that windowless environments add to stress and detract from healing, Joey and Janet Fischer have developed new ways to bring nature inside. One of their more innovative offerings: the electronic window, an outdoor scene backed by a computer-driven light box that simulates the passage of time, even using fiber optics to put stars in the night sky."

The article goes on to recount how the Fischers have marketed this product after noticing certain windowless rooms in hospitals. "Since then, their images of nature have been placed in hundreds of medical and business locations all over the world."

The phoney window scene is at present being tested in submarines, and some versions allow the viewer to manipulate the picture or peer at still other pseudo-real depictions of "nature".

Sales of the contrivance have recently amounted to \$800,000 per year.

I wonder how much longer it will be before the rest of the story comes true.

The old man cleared his throat and coughed faintly. "Don't know. Don't 'wish' anything in particular. Just wanted..."

"In that case, sir," the operator said firmly, "I'm afraid I'll have to ask you to address Nurs-a-Matic."

"Hold it! Stop! Yeah, I need to know what time they're going to pull the plug on me today. I couldn't get it from this damn computer. Something about some-odd point something units of meditation and then that'd be it."

"Just a moment, sir. Yes. That is a 3.72-unit time during which you can think about your life and prepare for euthanizing." Brock thought he saw a slight expression of pity flicker across the girl's face, but he couldn't be sure.

"What's that in minutes, young lady? An' izzat after lunch, I hope? Sure would hate to go without lunch. Ain't digested breakfast yet, a' course, but you know how it is."

"Sir, 3.72 units is approximately equal to one-half of the old 'hours'." Now Brock could tell from the operator's expression that she had scant patience for anybody who hadn't even bothered to learn metric time. He could tell, too, that she was probably an awful good-looking woman when she didn't have that uniform on. Or anything else on. He stared wistfully.

"Will that be all, sir?"

Brock struggled to prolong the interaction. "Oh.... uh.... Yeah. Listen: I think there's a little mistake in the Nurs-a-Matic programming." A frown of interest

came from the screen. "See, a while ago it was telling me all that stuff, and it said 'medatation'. Get it? Med-A-tation."

"Sir?"

"Doncha see? Oughtta be 'meditation'. 'I', not 'a' there."

"One moment, sir." And then, before Brock could hurry on, the human face vanished and the screen went blank. Brock tiredly mumbled some more archaic swear-words and sank back into his pillow.

The Personalized Station operator, on breaking the connection with Brock, punched a channel to her supervisor.

"State your problem," a bored male voice commanded.

"Patient referentializes terms: 'i', 'a'. I possess no knowledge of these. Please explain."

"Huh? Eye, ay?"

"Patient, pre-finalization euthanasia, reason age, states Nurs-a-Matic programming is defective because word 'meditation' has what he calls 'i', not 'a'."

After a minute more of conversation about the point Brock had raised, the supervisor punched 'Hold.' He had to call his supervisor.



ROCK, also on hold, waited uncomplainingly in his room, eager to see the operator's young, delightful face appear on the screen again. Women! How he missed them. He'd been missing them longer than he cared to



T the Personalized Service room, Operator Supervision re-emerged from holding. The young woman gazed interestedly as the figure on her monitor supplied clarification to her question of earlier that day. "...Nomenclature referentializes alphabetic record-keeping and communicationalizing. Visual system only, utilized prior to our own century when electronics was unknown. Program-Central decisionates alphabetic categorization insufficient to effectuate programmatic tune-backs."

"So the patient's suggestonality can be entered under what accountable section? —Handled? Or routed?"

"Neither. File it in 'Non-Applicability.' You might compliment the old guy, though, on having such an accurate memory."

"Mmm, no." She smiled professionally. "Can't do that. Finalization effectuated in this case at 55.72, so he's gone. Anyway, all he did was rave and curse. I'm sure he's better off."

The music kept going through Brock's head. My mind is wandering, he thought. My mind has always wandered, though. Maybe worse now; can't get a song out of my thoughts... 'I let a song go out of my heart,' —that was back when there was really music.

'A nightingale tells his fairy tale—'

Not that shitty song from last year: 'No way!' (boom, thud) 'No way!' (thud, boom) 'No way!' (crash, crash) ...and on and on. No, REAL songs:

'*The lonely night discloses*

Just a passing breeze...'

'*He blew his mind out in a car...'*

Can't get those now. They're locked in my mind. I go, they go.

"Where's my lunch? Hey, you, UNIT. Isn't it dinner yet?"

"Time: 47.3, sir."

"Whenever in hell that is."

Brock was exhausted. He stretched out as comfortably as he could with the connections to technology trailing from his body, and he sighed as he listened to the music in his mind. The dreams came on in a rush, and some time later when the robot's mechanical syllables issued in a short burst, he merely stirred slightly and stretched out his arm to the woman beside him, but she was long, long gone. Nemo was up on his chest again, and the old cat was heavier and heavier. As she nuzzled, her face felt soft like a mask over his nose and mouth.

think about. I have lived entirely too long, he mused. But still hate to go. 'No words can tell how sad it makes me.'

Remembering that, he smiled for an instant. It was a line in an old song. Jolson had sung it before Brock was even born, and Brock, who never had been comfortable in his own era, used to play Jolson songs on an obsolete phonograph when he was still a young man. He remembered the old cat he'd had who'd loved this tune; when the record would play, Captain Nemo would leap in through the open window. Sleek and solid black, but with a hint of brown visible in bright sunlight, like some faded old fur in a pawnshop window. Brock would lie in bed reading, and when the song came on, the cat would creep up on his chest and push his book aside. She'd nuzzle his face until he whistled along with the record.

Toot toot Tootsie, goodbye!

Toot toot Tootsie, don't cry.

That choo-choo train that takes me

Away from you —

No words can tell how sad it makes me...

He wondered if there were any cats left now. Hell, there must be a few someplace, even if they were "parasitic animals" that didn't serve any purpose, and used up food in times when there wasn't even

enough for people. Brock remembered when they passed the law.

Kiss me, Tootsie, and then —

Do it over again.

Watch for the mail; I'll never fail;

If you don't get a letter then you'll know

I'm in jail...

Parasitic animals! He glared at the Nurs-a-Matic robot crouching near his bed. His eyes followed the tubes that led out of his left arm, out of both legs and his penis, carrying fluids to be doped, medicated, or disposed of. Parasitic animals! At least animals gave you love in return. Computers, now—! Brock still regarded them as computers, but the word had gone out of vogue. Damned things, just machines. No, not even that. Brock's dim eyesight swept over the plastic surface of the Nurs-a-Matic: this was no machine; no moving parts anywhere. Machines had to move, didn't they? Nowadays machines didn't move anymore. Machines had died, too! They'd been a lot like people, the old man thought. He remembered when his ancient automobile had at last been taken away from him, and he went to the recycling yard to see it loaded in with other scrap and pressed in a gigantic hydraulic compactor that mashed it beyond recognition. He'd cried then. He'd cried when the old cat with the sun-faded black fur had died.

sponge, while others probed the secrets of the tiny wasteland that lay within a drop of water. No end in sight.

The world just gets worse, Brock thought. Never as bad as you figured it would, but always worse. It won't go to the end, but if it did it would go farther. Late afternoon, evening, gloom, but never midnight. He wondered why it never went the other way. It was like Maxwell's Demon, that let the heat flow toward the cold but never the other way. Brock grunted.

From the corner issued flat tones of the Nurs-a-Matic. "If assistance is desired, please address this unit."

"Don't care to address you. God, I never thought I'd end my days talking to a circuitboard that can hear but not listen. I hate you! Do you realize that, you damned blight, you bastard ruination?"

An alleviating dosage of blood-pressure counteractant flowed through one of the tubes.

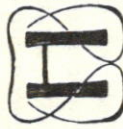
Brock closed his eyes. He dreamed that Nemo was up on his chest again. "Seven times he got aboard his train," the old man sang. "And seven times he hurried back, to kiss his love again and tell her, 'Toot toot Tootsie, goodbye...'"

"If assistance is desired, please address..."

"Seven times! You catch that, you—you Computer?! Figured you didn't! Seven times he got aboard, and seven times he hurried back! He never got aboard that train AT ALL!"

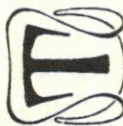
"If assistance..."

calculated counteractive dosage of sedative into the hardening veins of the ancient human.



IS vision of the future had always been dramatic. Soaring parapets, colorful cities and costumes, convenience and freedom almost undreamed of. Or maybe it would go the other way: flood waters ravaging the greatest cities as melting polar caps brought the seas inland. Thermonuclear fires reducing the world to outposts of neanderthal survivalists preaching god in nasal voices and gunning each other to death over women-as-property.

It was neither. The future was just the same as usual, only more tiresome, dirtier, constricted. Not absolutely intolerable; it happened so slowly you got used to it. So things went downhill but they never reached bottom. It was like looking at a huge limitless desert and fixating down to a grain of sand; the closer you looked at the sand, the still greater detail you saw. The sand was tinier crystals, and those were molecules of silicon and oxygen. You sank down among those and saw atoms that were limitless expanses in their own right, harboring whole planets that were made up of greater and greater detail of more rocks and crystals and atoms. And down on some lonely beachhead lit by strange rays of the proton sun, you looked in wonder at the endless universe above and heard the scientists there debating models of the cosmos that organized matter like a



HE Personalized Station operator flickered back onto the viewing screen, and her voice chimed through the transducer.

"Mr. Brock, pre-input informationalistic requestization has been procedurated. Nurs-a-Matic linguisticl programification will impact review-wise when verificationl authorities get back to us."

The old man shuddered. "Girl, I hope you have a hell of a lot more idea what you're talking about than I do. Is it school or what? Who gets you to talk that way?"

"What way?"

"Procedurate, requesticize, programify! Jesus Christ almighty damn! I never heard such stuff. You sound just like this goddamn computer."

"If that will be all, sir—"

"No! Wait a second! On that deal where they pull the plug on me today, you said I got a half-hour advance time, or whatever it is, right?"

"It's 3.72 units, sir."

"Whatever. Is that after lunch? How long is it from now?"

"It is now 38.614. Pre-Terminal inaugurates at exactly 52.000. And now, if there's nothing else..."

"Could you, maybe, come up here and have lunch with me?"

The young woman blinked and almost staggered back from the view-camera at the obscene suggestion. She vanished from the screen.

* * *

Brock dozed for a while, as he usually did at this time of day, but forced himself to wake up. These were his last moments on earth, after all. Couldn't spend 'em sleeping.

He wished there was a window in the room. It had been years since he'd seen the outdoors directly. The screen would put on any outside view, in full color, but for all he knew it was just computer memory, or outright simulation. You had to look at something directly to know if it was real.

No windows; no bookcase. In fact, people didn't even know what books were anymore. Book-vendors sold laseras and microvidics, both of which now went under the generic name of books. But they were no more books than that piece of talking chem-lab equipment in the corner was a nurse. Brock missed, horribly, having pages to read. Sure, the same stuff was on TV or the "book" depiction mediums, and by act of law the sum total of the human race's writing and experience was theoretically available—the word was "accessibilizing"—to every videoscreen, in hospitals as well as the priv-pris communities where everyone else lived. This is what a free society was all about. In practice, however, things were considerably different. In the real world it had been simply impossible to transfer everything printed over to electronic storage as had been glibly promised. When the law took effect banning paper as a waste of resources, special-interest groups immediately began jockeying for influence over the procedures and operations. "Universal transcrip-

tion" as it was called in the debate stages of the law, quickly mutated into an affair of licenses, permits, approval and "compliance", after the law was passed. There had been court fights and protests over books that didn't meet the guidelines, and perhaps more significantly, no protests or court fights over books and magazines whose possible advocates had long since vanished, or, if alive, lacked the resources or media backing needed to become objects of debate. Eventually it all got over with, but the few people in a position to compare their recollections with the new reality privately admitted that most works in the library banks did seem a lot shorter and simpler now than before.

Brock's own work hadn't made it in at all. He was a writer of such low visibility that not one of his almost 200 publications was now even catalogued in the memories. His name did appear, with a note that the approved researcher could, on proper application, "referentialize paper-unit storage facilities". In his seventies, Brock once made the journey after several years of applications to various agencies, but was unable to find any of his pamphlets, journals or books even at the huge Facility. Unless something he'd once published now lay accidentally in one of the small piles at one of the licensed antique-dealers, all the complex thought of his whole life that he'd put on paper had drained completely out of the tub, forever. He sobbed slightly, and the rush of emotion registered in the medical robot, which immediately released the